

*the WHITE HOUSE* PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

# Unleashing Innovation & Deepening Democracy Through Prizes

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**Summary:** Today in Washington, hundreds of leaders from the White House and Federal agencies joined their peers from the Nation's most recognizable companies and organizations to develop strategies to use prizes and competitions as a key method to spark innovation and deepen citizen engagement.

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Prizes have a long history of driving important breakthroughs: Napoleon's 1800 Food Preservation Prize resulted in the invention of canning; the 1927 Orteig Prize helped inspire Charles Lindbergh to make the first nonstop flight from New York to Paris. More recently, the 2011 [Wendy Schmidt Oil Cleanup X Challenge](#) spurred an Illinois company to create a cleanup method for oil slicks that is four times more effective than any previous one.

It is with that powerful history in mind that today, in Washington, hundreds of leaders from the White House and Federal agencies joined their peers from some of the Nation's most recognizable companies and organizations to develop strategies to use prizes and competitions as a key method to spark innovation and deepen citizen engagement.

You may ask: Are prizes still relevant? Absolutely. New social media tools have enabled smarter and more cost-effective approaches, and the public sector has begun to take advantage of prizes as a way of tackling some of the most perplexing challenges that affect us all – with promising results.

Experience shows that prizes are a catalyst for innovation. They reward and elevate excellence –

and encourage it to spread. Through programs such as our [America's Giving Challenges](#), we at the Case Foundation have long supported prizes as a way to ignite community engagement, connect with hard-to-reach populations, spur innovation, and make philanthropy more democratic.

In the past few years, there has been unprecedented growth in the use of prizes, by large and small organizations alike. The list is lengthy – from challenges that encourage people to generate support for their own causes (like the [Chase Community Giving Challenge](#)), to competitions focused on specific topic areas (like the Knight Foundation's [News Challenges](#) that aims to spark new approaches to journalism), to GE's [Healthymagination](#) initiative, awarding \$100 million for promising breast cancer research ideas.

The White House has been at the forefront of a similar appreciation of prizes and competitions in the public sector. Stemming from the Obama administration's [Open Government Initiative](#) and the [America COMPETES Act](#), which together strongly encourage and provide specific guidance on the use of competitions and challenges in the Federal Government, there has been significant [momentum in the use of incentive prizes in the public sector](#) in the past two years. In 2010, we partnered with the White House to host a forum that brought together decision makers from several agencies and trailblazers in the private sector to share lessons and develop strategies for the future. This helped lead to the launch of [Challenge.gov](#), a one-stop clearinghouse that agencies can use to mount their own challenges.

So what were the results? A retired engineer from Lima, Peru, for example, won a prize in an [Air Force Research Laboratory competition](#) for creating a low-cost, safe, and effective way to safely stop fleeing vehicles by using a small, remote-controlled platform that accelerates to 130 mph in 3 seconds and inflates a balloon under the escaping car. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Flu App Challenge competition resulted in "Flu-Ville!", an app that brings flu data to more individuals by folding the information into a game. And the Department of Veterans Affairs' first-ever prize competition focused on strategies to implement the "Blue Button," which gives veterans easy access to their health care records wherever they are. This innovation is expected to reach one million people by the end of the summer.

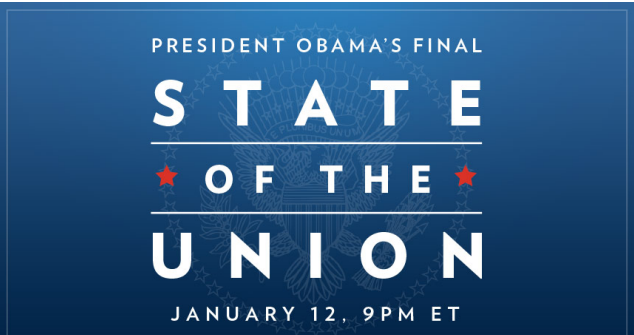
To find new ideas and solutions for solving a range of challenges, our Nation must be willing to fearlessly experiment and embrace approaches like prizes that produce impact. For the Case Foundation (and for other foundations like the Joyce Foundation, our partner for this year's gathering), prizes and challenges are about democratizing problem-solving and engaging with citizens. For government entities like NASA and the CDC, it's about finding solutions to long-standing problems. For citizens, it's about stepping up and being part of the solution in an

exciting way. Whatever the reason, this effective tool is here to stay.

**Learn More:**

- [Report to Congress regarding Prizes & America COMPETES](#)
- [Blog on Prizes & America COMPETES](#)
- [Collaborative Innovation: Public Sector Prizes Forum](#)

*Jean Case is CEO of the Case Foundation.*



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